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Niger Delta Poetry: Trauma, Blues and Bibliotherapy

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Abstract

Poets from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria explore the devastating effect of oil capitalism and its traumatic manifestations on the emotions and psyches of the region's indigenes. Beyond the depiction of psychological trauma, some of the poets deploy a characteristic rhythm that is capable of facilitating psychotherapy. Although studies on Niger Delta poetry have acknowledged issues of minority discourse, ecological despoliation and the politics of dispossession, they seem to overlook the exploration of the people's psychological responses to the destructions induced by the oil companies. This study, therefore, examines the psychotherapeutic merit in the blues-like rhythm of Niger Delta poetry within the ambit of bibliotherapy. Poems in three poetry collections were selected through purposive sampling and were critically analysed. The collections, Ibiwari Ikiriko's Oily Tears of the Delta, Ebi Yeibo's The Forbidden Tongue and Ebinyo Ogbowi Song of a Dying River, were evaluated using the Trauma Model.

Keywords: *Poetry therapy, Niger Delta poetry, Trauma studies, Bibliotherapy*

Introduction

The exploration of traumatic experiences in Nigerian poetry underscores the poets' consciousness of the prevailing psychosocial challenges in their communities. As a regional poetic expression, modern Nigerian poetry, of which Niger Delta poetry is an integral part, portrays the sociological and psychological conditions of the people to whom it is attributed. In response to the human existential realities, the poet plays a multiple role of information, entertainment and healing. In essence, art, to both the creator and consumer, has a spiritual and transcendental function as a redeemer of the soul (Bamidele, 2003:26). Rhythm plays a vital role in asserting the redemptive value of literature, because the transition of life, the breath that keeps up such transition involves beats that promote one's physical and mental rejuvenation (Kekeghe, 2014: 60). Poetry, like music, pleases with beats, visual and other sensory images, which serve as vehicles that convey the poet's thoughts and emotions. The poet, therefore, demonstrates artistic commitment in double credit— first, as an entertainer with rhythm and second, as a voice of vision in society. The sing-song qualities of poetry and other resources

such as versification of form are common qualities of music, which are utilised to convey human experiences, thoughts and feelings.

Poetic and musical forms have been increasingly recognised to offer unique healing to the human mind and body. This is what makes these related art forms applicable in the field of psychotherapy. Pioneering ideas on the medicinal import of music are traceable to Phoebus Apollo, the Greek god of the sun, poetry and medicine. Shelly's poem, "Hymn of Apollo", clearly portrays the intersections of poetry, music and medicine. Words conveyed through rhythm have been proven to carry therapeutic import, which is beneficial to the human psychological composition. Caroll (2005) examines the "potential of poetry to heal" (p. 161) and argues that the process of articulating traumatic experiences through poetry brings about therapeutic import. Like Caroll, Chavis (2011) opines that in the course of relating the human condition, the expressive art of poetry elicits healing. According to Chavis, rhythm, sounds and free verse, which are common features of poetry, can offer some therapeutic effects.

The concept of bibliotherapy was coined by Samuel Crothers in 1916 to capture the restorative value of literary works on the human mind. The term "biblio" means books, and by extension, literature. The word "therapy", on the other hand, is derived from the Greek word "therapeia", meaning "to serve or help medically." Bibliotherapy, therefore, refers to the use of literature to promote mental health (Gillam, 2018). Rottenberg (2022) regards bibliotherapy as "an integrative psychotherapeutic channel" (p.27). Like scriptotherapy, bibliotherapy means writing creative works to restore the mind from different forms of psychological distress such as melancholia, depression and anxiety conditions. However, scriptotherapy focuses mainly on the medical value of writing on the psychology of the writer, as his/her repressed feelings are brought to the surface, fully explored and laid to rest, giving room for ventilation of such emotions (Owonibi, 2008, p. 89). The terms, poetry therapy and bibliotherapy, are often used interchangeably to depict the use of poetry and literary works generally for mental healing. The potency of the bibliotherapeutic technique has been affirmed by writers, readers, book administrators and librarians (Fanner & Urquhart, 2008; McCulliss, 2012). Poetry has been known as a potent literary form for psychiatric treatment (Oyebode, 2009). In this study, the blues-like melancholic rhythm of Niger Delta poetry is investigated as invigorative.

Blues is the name given to a characteristic melancholic musical form or genre that originated in African-American communities of primarily the "deep south" of the United States around the end of the 19th century from spirituals, work songs, field hollers, shouts and chants, and rhyme (Lomax, 1993; Herzhaft, et al, 1997; Bowman, 2008). An early use of the term is found

in George Colman's one-act farce, *Blue Devil* (1798), which is said to mean a melancholy and sadness. Paradoxically, the characteristic slow-paced, melancholic tone that constitutes the blues musical form has inspired musicians and their audiences. There is a sense of mental rejuvenation or catharsis, which blues offers to the human psyche. The peculiar rhythm deployed by the poets under study agrees with the features of the blues musical form. Despite the despondent tone with which the poems are rendered, there is a characteristic pleasing pulsation which is remedial to the mental composition of the writer and the audience alike. The researcher argues that the blues-like rhythm, which involves pleasant sounds, a melancholic and sombre tone, is capable of penetrating the soul and psyche of the audience, thereby eliciting mental benefit. These features in the examined poems qualify them to be studied under the ambit of bibliotherapy.

This study argues that the poets express the traumatic experiences in the plundered Niger Delta region through a rhythm that is cathartic and revitalizing. For instance, in an interview, Ogbowei affirms that the lines of his poems, examined here, "touch mind and soul and point us to the right direction of social correctness and healthy relationship" (Kekeghe, 2012: 23). Yeibo adds that the issues he highlights in his poems "call for soberness and even sadness" adding that "the tone or rhythm of the poems is reflective of the magnitude of the issues at stake" (Kekeghe, 2012: 24). The study contends that through such invigorating rhythms, the poets and their repressed audiences transcend the trauma.

Trauma is a psychological and emotional response to a distressing experience, which is caused by several disturbing factors like war and violence, accident, fire outbreak, social injustice, loss of loved ones, spousal betrayal, sexual and domestic violence. Through the resources of language, writers convey manifestations of psychological trauma in literature. Trauma studies started in the 1990s, and it was pioneered by scholars like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geofrey Hartman and Dominick LapCapra amongst others (Caruth, 1996 and Buelens and Craps 2008). According to Mambrol (2020), trauma studies relate the impact of trauma in literature and society, and it emphasises the psychological, rhetorical, and cultural dimensions of trauma. The nexus between trauma and literature has been acknowledged by different scholars of trauma studies. Buelens and Craps (2008) examine postcolonial trauma novels, showing how the repressive postcolonial realities impact traumatic experiences which are recreated in novels. Caruth (2014) argues that literature memorialises the traumatic experiences which she regards as the 'ashes of history.'

Trauma studies in Nigerian literature tend to pay closer attention to prose fiction. The interface between trauma and bibliotherapy has not received significant attention in Nigerian poetry, particularly the regional poetry of the Niger Delta. From the angle of scriptotherapy, Owonibi (2008) examines *A Stroke of Hope* as Tayo Olafioye's effort to stimulate self-healing through poetry when he was subjected to surgical operations. Owonibi portrays the connection between depression and healing but his research is not specifically on bibliotherapy in Niger Delta poetry. Kekeghe (2017) investigates melancholic depression in the poetry of Wumi Raji and demonstrates that creative writers, especially poets, explore distressing feelings in their works. Though Kekeghe acknowledges the possible therapeutic implication of poeticizing agonizing memories and thoughts, the study is not on Niger Delta poetry. Adewusi (2019) examines depictions of trauma in Niyi Osundare's poetry, but his study does not investigate the poet's attempt to negotiate healing through the narration of traumatic memories. This current study, therefore, examines the interplay of trauma and bibliotherapy in Niger Delta poetry.

The Niger Delta region comprises the six states of the South-South geopolitical zone including Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Cross Rivers and Edo as well as Ondo, Imo and Abia States (Darah, 2014: 37). Since the discovery of oil at Oloibiri, Bayelsa state in 1956, and later in other parts of the Niger Delta in commercial quantities, the Niger Delta region became a troubled landscape. The restless quest for the oil has worsened the poverty in the region, such that the common Niger Deltan believes that the Nigerian state has employed every available tool in systematically emasculating the Niger Delta region and depriving it the benefits of its natural resources. Oil and gas from the Niger Delta region account for over 90% of Nigeria's export earnings, yet the region wallows in abject poverty, and its environment suffers degradation as a result of oil exploration activities (Okaba 2005:6). Expectedly, these experiences have left the Niger Deltans embittered. The above injustices meted out on the people birthed a poetic tradition that is melancholic like the traditional blues. This study pays critical attention to Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta,* Ebi Yeibo's *The Forbidden Tongue* and G. Ebinyo Ogbowei's *Song of a Dying River.*

Sounds and Emotion: Locating Trauma and Psychotherapy in the Cadences of Poems

In the examined poems, the poets do not merely reflect the traumatic memories of the Niger Delta natives, they do so through a somber and intriguing combination of sound devices. Through the deployment of sound resources of sounds, the poets convey pleasant rhythms that are restorative and energising. In spite of the technology of printing, poets have effectively managed the tradition of song that is associated with poetry through the appropriation of cadences of sounds. Walter Peter's declaration that poetry "constantly aspires to the condition

of music" and Canon Dixon's description of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry as a "matter of ear" (Egudu, 1979:53) attest to the sing-song quality of poetry. The sing-song quality of these poems helps to convey thoughts and feelings. Ibiwari Ikiriko, Ebi Yeibo and 'Ebinyo Ogbowei express the social upheavals and trauma in their land, and negotiate health through the cadences of sounds. By implication, the bibliotherapeutic technique utilised by the poets is directed at healing the psychological trauma or depressive moods of the people. The poets' creative engagements reveal that poetry must serve as a platform to promote hope and vision.

In "Song", Ebi Yeibo makes a profound relaying of his healing mission as a song-poet, whose mission is to light up the foggy mind of the downtrodden in the Niger Delta and beyond:

Let us
*M*ake canorous *m*usic
From

The deep croaks

O*f* drunk *f*rogs

Moisten calci*f*ied *f*armlands

With scathing manure
*C*leanse *c*ringing *c*reeks
Cadavers and maelstroms
With *s*earing *s*ong
(*The Forbidden Tongue,* 19)

Yeibo sees the verse as a vehicle through which the disillusioned can receive hope and succour. The lines of Yeibo's poem above reveal that the Niger Delta poet is armed with "searing songs" to "make music" that is capable of bringing healing to the wounded landscape of the Delta ("cleanse cringing creeks") which is of mental benefit to the poet's people and audience. The cleansing of the ravaged creek underscores the resuscitation of the people's economic life, which has been ruined by crude oil and flaring gas. The disturbing experience of oil spillage resonates in the lines above. In "Dawn Song," Yeibo goes on to raise a 'song' of hope for the people, through the deployment of highly rhythmic lines:

*L*et so*l*o reapers
Ripen communal farm
That graying labourers
May *g*ather *g*rains

*L*et the e*l*oquent sun
*S*ing harvest *s*ongs
In the rumbling stomachs
Of *s*ulky *s*aints
That *d*rowsy *d*reams may awaken
To the *d*ialect of *d*awn

(*The Forbidden Tongue,* 25).

For the realisation of the despondent but delightful rhythm, Yeibo utilises different sound devices such as alliteration, consonance, assonance, repetition, refrain, parallelism, and onomatopoeia. The weaving together of these poetic tools enhances the accomplishment of invigorating, melancholic verse which bears the texture of blues. Like the other poets whose works are examined in this study, Yeibo interlaces stylistic resources with a rhythm of anguish that appears recuperative. This is in agreement with Ojaide's observation that in the works of the new poets "simplicity, chanting, repetition and incantatory rhythms are common techniques" (Ojaide, 2002, p.143).

Alliteration is an aural stylistic cadence that is utilised in the examined poems. Alliteration is the repetition of consonantal sounds at the initial position of words in a line of poetry. James Reeves regards alliteration as "an essential… element in the sound pattern of poetry" (Egudu, 1979, p. 53). The infusion of the device of alliteration encourages the sing-song quality of poems. In Yeibo's **"**Silent Sorrow**",** for instance, the use of alliterative sound gives birth to a grief-stricken rhythm that stimulates psychological releases:

We *s*leep *s*upine /s/
On bedbugs of sorrow
Awake all night

To *s*tinging *s*ong of the *s*eason /s/

Dawn bristles with *s*oulful *s*aviours /s/
Showing us *w*hining *w*hetstones/w/

That only blunt our spirits

Dawn bristles with *d*rizzling *d*ews /d/

Disfiguring *f*orest of *f*un /f/
*F*oiling *f*oliages of *f*anfare /f/

And even *f*anciful *f*lowers /f/

On loamy soil

Flaunt *p*etals of *p*atrimony /p/

Here, dawn bristles with

With *h*ollow *h*elmet of *h*ope /h/

*C*ornering us to *c*losed *c*ontours /k/

Crashing us on *s*toneless *s*oils /s/

Dawn bristles

With a *f*iery *f*lame of *f*raud/f/
Burning up *b*lossoming *b*arns /b/
Like brittle forest
In the *h*eart of the *h*armattan /h/
(*Forbidden Tongue,* 31)

The poetic lines above relate the pitiable condition of the people who have lost their means of continuous existence, like farming, fishing and hunting, to the intractable oil multinationals. Yeibo uses the poem to communicate the psychological trauma caused by the extractive industry of oil and gas. As characteristic of the lamentatory tone on which the poem is pitched, most of the repeated consonantal sounds here are hissing sibilants such as /f/ and /s/. These hissing sounds foreground the psychological pains and anguish that the people are subjected to. Therefore, the infusion of alliteration helps to relate the poet's psychological and emotional state to the audience. Despite the agony relayed in the poetic lines, the liveliness of the rhythm and sounds is meant to enliven the mind of the audience. In other words, what the Niger Delta poets 'sing' of is remedial because the audience participates in the poetic recreation of their agonies. Again, in Yeibo's "Sighs", we are confronted by the poet's appraisal of the irresponsive political elite that persistently shatter the dream of the people. Remarkably, we experience the stirring lament of the poet, which is realised through alliteration:

We *w*ho sow *d*rizzling *d*reams/d/
In the *f*ertile *f*ields of reforms /f/
This *s*eason of *s*urplus /s/
K*n*ow *n*ot the *h*em of *h*arvest's apron /n, h/

…

Of their *c*rimson *c*onnivance/k/
May the *s*anctimonious *s*mile /s/
…

*H*aunt the *h*owling *h*orror/h/
…
of *s*uppressed *s*ighs /s/
(*Forbidden Tongue,* 52-53).

Beyond the anguished tone, we perceive the confident tone of hope where the poet boldly deals with every instrument of oppression and repression unleashed on the people, including the despoliation of their lands and water bodies, as well as their marginalisation and repression. This is woven together through the device of alliteration. For instance, the glottal sound /h/ involves the free-flow of air through the glottis— its use here suggests the ventilation of the poet's anguished mood which is representative of the moods of the Niger Delta indigenes. Such sibilant fricatives that suggest hissing sounds as /s/ and /f/ help to make vivid the agony that runs through the verse. The researchers argue that this melancholic tone is capable of spellbinding the mind of the reader and inspiring some psychotherapeutic benefits. The /d/ and the /k/ sounds foreground the rhythm of anguish and reinforce the discontentment of the persona. Yeibo's use of the hissing fricative /s/ dominates his poem— it is paradoxically suggestive of agony and recuperation. In "Dawn Song", he croons:

Let *s*prawling *s*eas /s/
*S*tem the *s*urge /s/
Of *s*ententious *s*aints /s/
*S*tabbing our *s*un /s/
With *s*errated *s*ermon /s/
(*The Forbidden Tongue*, 22)

From the foregoing rhythm, one enjoys the melancholic tone of the persona. It is evident that the poet is openly confronting the tormentors of their land, including the greedy political elite, the desperate hydro-engineers and hydro-physicists that manifest all forms of suppressive and oppressive tendencies to doom the people's collective aspirations. However despondent the

poetic tempo is, it energises the reader like the traditional blues. This is because it is pleasant to the ear and the mind.

In Ogbowei's "For Gabriel Okara", he weaves alliterative sounds to comment on different problems affecting his people. He regards the Niger Delta region as a "bruised boulevard" that is in urgent need of redemption. The general issues of corruption and insensitivity of our leaders is brought to the fore through this poem:

> The bawling infant's dream
> Reveals *h*oary *h*eads /h/
> *D*exterous *d*rummers /d/
> *D*ancing *d*own a *b*ruised *b*oulevard /d/, /b/
> To *d*iscover a new *d*awn /d/
> In the *m*ambo *m*assage /m/
> Where potbellied balogun
> Squanders *p*olice *p*ension funds /p/
>
> On *p*lump *p*rostitutes /p/
> (*Song of a Dying River, 20*).

Lamenting the spillage on the people's water bodies, Ogbowei recounts with titillating choices of alliteratives:

> His *b*lackened *b*eaches /b/
> *R*eeking *r*iver and *c*oated *c*reeks /r/, /k/
> *C*asualties of a *c*ursed marriage /k/
> *C*ontrived for *c*onvenience /k/
>
> (*Song of a Dying River,* 30).

The striking rhythm generated by the repetitive use of the alliterative sounds above intensifies the revitalising benefit of the poem on the reader. Ogbowei's vitriolic voice is aimed at giving birth to a society that is physically, psychologically and ecologically healthy. Furthermore, Ogbowei employs alliterative sounds to unfold the contradictions and paradoxes of life. He sings of a society where misery becomes a routine; a society where criminality is legalised. In such a situation, according to the poet, it is difficult for someone to stand out and tell the others to cheer up:

What therapeutic *t*ale *t*rinya /t/
Does the *l*eaking *l*eper /l/
*T*ell the *t*earful *t*eacher /t/
*B*reached on a *b*ench /b/
Before her *p*uling *p*upils /p/

(*Song of a Dying River, 30*).

The melancholic rhythm above suggests the despondent mood of the poet, who impersonates the trauma of his folks. Despite the anguished tone that pervades the poem, the pitch is pleasurable. This is because music is enjoyed not necessarily for the thought or feeling it suggests, but for the auditory pleasure it generates. Similarly, Yeibo, in "The Poet", unfolds his healing mission as one who measures "the mood of men" through an impressive use of alliteration. He sings:

The *p*rescient *p*oet /p/
Courts a *t*rillion *t*empests /t/
*M*easuring the *m*ood of *m*en /m/
with *p*arameter of *p*iety /p/

(*The Forbidden Tongue, 29*)

Yeibo's submission above foregrounds the mission of the Niger Delta poets, who deploy poetry to relate the social devastations and the ensuing psychological trauma caused by the obliteration of the Niger Delta lands and water bodies by the oil extractors and capitalists. In reflecting on the people's suffering, the poets offer the reader beautiful cadences of songs such that one will be held spellbound. It is this anguished tone that is concretely expressed in Ogbowei's "Your Yowl":

I'll drink the *w*ine you *w*eep /w/
Eat the *b*read you *b*ake /b/
…
Roasted over fires of *c*ommunal *c*onflicts /k/
*M*ercenaries of the *m*arket /m/
Profiteers in *f*atigues of *f*reedom /f/
Assaults the *r*amparts of *r*eason /r/ (54).

While the poets employ alliteration to weave an appealing rhythm, it is wise to argue here that the consonantal choices are aimed at birthing a soothing pulse that generates a cathartic force. The poets, under study, have fashioned sounds that correspond to the mood and should adequately help to suggest a feeling of wholeness.

Repetition is another resource of music that is utilised by the poets to convey an exhilarating rhythm. As the musician repeats some musical tones in certain combinations, patterns or melodies, so does the poet repeat certain sound combinations to create an appealing effect to the reader. Repetition is the commonest feature of rhythm (Egudu, 1979: 34). The creativity that is inherent in the successive repetition of words or lines generates a special auditory impact. The deployment of repetition promotes the musical effects of the poems under investigation. According to Okpewho (1992), "the repetition of a phrase, a line or a passage does have a certain sing-song quality to it" (p. 71). Through the resources of repetition, we notice the enthralling narration of grief that resonates in Ikiriko's "Remembering Saro-Wiwa". The despondent, elegiac tone of the poem, like the characteristic melancholy of blues music, creates an auditory entanglement in the audience's mind:

Let's not forget

That Saro Wiwa

Was a writer

A writer
Let's not forget
That Saro-Wiwa
Was a righter

A righter

Let's not forget

That the cause

Of his hanging

Is still clinging
To the bottom of oil wells
And let's not forget
That his hanging

Is still sticking

To the remains of our conscience

Like sludges on mud-flat
(*Oily Tears,* 24).

The poem above laments the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a writer and activist who was extra-judicially hanged by the dictatorial regime of Sanni Abacha in 1998 to end his struggle for the emancipation of his Ogoni people from the despoliation of their land by Shell. The death of Ken Saro-Wiwa is a major tragedy because he was the people's leading actor in the fight for liberation. The tragic execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa unfolds the repressive manifestations of the Federal Government and the multinational oil companies on the natives of the oil belt area of the Delta. The poet's lamentation creates a liberating measure for the reader who shares in this loss.

Ikiriko goes further to express in "Odi", a wailing rhythm that unfurls the massacre of Odi by the Federal Government. This is realised through a masterly blend of repeated lines, phrases and words. The music that is derived from this repetition brings to the fore the anguish of the natives as harboured by the persona. Apart from the message which is derivable from the poem, the audience receives a special auditory effect from this melancholic lilt. The emotional benefits generated from the sound will further enhance the reader's intense reflection on the message. This is why Kreuzer (1995) notes that in the business of dealing with sound in poetry, "the larger part is discovering what the function of the sound pattern is in terms of the poem as a whole" (67). The intense reflection of the magic music created by the sounds and the sorrowful or hopeful message they generate could bring about a remedial effect on the reader's psyche. Again, Ikiriko declares:

Odi

Odi
Odi o odi

Did Odi do the deed?

Odi

O damn it

Odi o Odi

…

Did Odi do the deed

That caused the remainder

To be razed defunct and
Natives homeless and borrow villages
To mourn the dawning millennium?

(*Oily Tears,* 63).

From the lines above, the device of repetition helps to generate an auditory pleasure. The most valid function of the music of poetry is not to suggest thought but to beautify thought and make it aesthetically pleasing. A poem that does not have much thought to communicate can still qualify as poetry mainly because of its organised sound pattern that spawns a pleasing melody. This is because the central point of music is the emotion evoked by the rhythm, not necessarily the thought communicated (Egudu, 1979: 63-66). Like Ikiriko, Yeibo deploys repetition in his poem, "Rage of the Delta," which underscores the distress and anger of the persona. He does much to express a confrontational rhythm which unfolds the pains of the natives that have been facing several years of deprivation and dispossession:

Dwellers of the delta
Wax wild on the wings of wreckage

Who wouldn't whose paradise
Becomes a prostitute's rag

Whose brooks brim
With bilious black blood

Whose dream host rabid jiggers?

…

Whose savoury swamps
Are cauldrons of chemicals

Whose patrician pockets
Hoist Harmattan flag

Whose hallowed virginity
Is stolen the wrong way
…
When a hawk swoops on chicks
The mother goes wild

(*The Forbidden Tongue,* 28)

Anyone with ear for music will appreciate the sonorous rhythmic beauty that is created by the poet through the repetitive use of "whose" in the poem above. In "Our Home Is Hurting", Ogbowei also deploys the technique of repetition. In this poem, what confronts the reader is the shrillness of wailing that sinks deeply into the mind, capturing thoughts and feelings:

It's one week now
Since I heard mummy sing to me

It's one week now
Since I heard daddy holler at me
…
They've come to console us
Who have no peace to give

They've come to console us
Who have no joy to share

They've come to console us
To toll the knell
Sad eyes stunned eyes
Eyes with poison in their depths

(*Song of a Dying River*, 90).

As this rhythm sinks into the readers' minds and souls, they will be enlivened by the expressional and musical beauty. While expressional beauty is concerned with the aesthetic use of words and images in the poems, musical beauty refers to the sensory pleasure generated by the combination of sounds. The employment of images of pain and hatred in the poem above conveys an expressional beauty, while the repetitive use of words depicts musical beauty. The

musical beauty, therefore, reinforces the expressional beauty. This tone is also evident in "Hurricane Turai":

hurricane turai
pummeling the pauperised province
…
the bridge of faith quakes goes down
the singing school bus goes down
the promise in the song of striplings
drowns in a roaring river

(*Song of a Dying River,* 25)

Hurricane is a powerful, rotating oceanic storm that possesses maximum sustained winds. In the poem above, Ogbowei reflects on the ravages which this natural disaster causes to human lives. Faced with such tragedy, Ogbowei creates an outlet for the collective trauma of his people, which he embodies. Despite the agonising atmosphere in which these poems are pitched, the beauty of the rendition, through the device of repetition, is enthralling. The immediate result of this beauty is pleasure, which is mental satisfaction. It is this gratification that brings remedial effects to the mind.

Refrain is another element of music that promotes the blues-like throb in the examined poems. Refrain is a form of repetition, which occurs at regular intervals in a poem. In Vulgar Latin, refrain is derived from the word, *refringere*, "to repeat"; and later from Old French *refraindre*, is the line or lines that are repeated in music or in verse. Like ordinary repetition, refrain makes for sonorous beauty and special auditory appeal. As in music, the refrain performs an emotive function in poetry. In Yeibo's "Dawn Song", an appealing rhythm is generated through the refrain, which is energising:

Let sprawling seas
Disgorge the swelling sewage
That gaily farts on us

O let sprawling seas

Stem the surge
Of sententious saints

Stabbing our sun

With serrated sermons

Let sprawling seas

Mop up trumped-up-mornings

That hides the titillating treasures

Of dawn

(*The Forbidden Tongue*, 22-23)

The refrain, "let sprawling seas", which appears at the beginning of every stanza, reinforces the trauma and tone of disenchantment in the poem. Beyond conveying the traumatic experiences of the people, the musicality created by the refrain is pleasing to the ears, and it elicits invigorating energy. The lines of the poem convey a tone of optimism that there will be an end to the pathetic condition of the people. This reassuring rhetoric is capable of inspiring positive energy. He croons:

I lie waiting at the crossroads
For the return of those renegades

Who barter a basket of yams

For a healthy bowl of beetles

…

I lie waiting at the crossroads
For the return of those renegades
Who counsel compromise
When conniving crows swoop
On our hapless sacrifice

…

I lie waiting at the crossroads
For the new lords of the land
Who murder the new moon
Right on our lap

(*The Forbidden Tongue, 21*)

The poem depicts a message of hope, which serves as a therapy for the collective trauma of the poet's homeland. The choice of language and the pulse have a powerful impact on the masses' mental composition. The language of the poem embodies the trauma and therapeutic mission of the poet. Scholars of trauma studies have recognised that trauma impacts the texture of language (Caruth, 2014). First, Yeibo identifies the people's enemies and the activators of their

trauma; second, he lights up their minds. The melancholic way in which these lines are rendered provokes thoughts and feelings.

The deployment of refrain is also evident in Yeibo's "Tsunami Reminds Us". In a cautionary tone, Yeibo employs the refrain, "Tsunami reminds us" at the beginning of every stanza, to caution the Delta against an imminent natural disaster, which may be caused by the plundering of the Delta landscape by the oil extractors. The sing-song effect created by this admonitory tone is pleasing:

> Tsunami reminds us
> Of the mixed palette
> Suckling nature's undying shrubs-
> …
>
> Tsunami reminds us
>
> Of the serenity of white clouds
> Suddenly overturned
>
> By thunder's deafening cannons-
> …
> Tsunami reminds us
> We stand in the middle of a maelstrom
>
> Weaving unpredictable waters
>
> To eke out a world-
> (*The Forbidden Tongue,* 37)

Refrain is a common quality of music which the Niger Delta poets under study utilize in order to produce a blues-like rhythm. With the harrowing experiences in the Niger Delta environment, the poets must croon songs of hope to placate the traumatized natives of the Niger Delta whose only means of income and living have been plundered and despoiled by the oil capitalists in connivance with the Federal Government.

Parallelism is another cadence of voice that is employed in the poems. Like other sound devices discussed above, parallelism enhances the rhythmic flow of the verse. Parallelism resembles repetition, but unlike lexical and structural repetition, parallelism is concerned with semantic repetition. Like repetition, it also emphasises themes and helps to achieve musicality. A good example of parallelism abounds in Ikiriko's "Evening Already":

> I had listen
> To the voices within me

To the voices around me

That I am a time bomb
Now I realize

That I am only a land mine
I had listened
To the voices within me
To the voices around me

That I am an oil bean seed
Now I realize
That I am only a coconut
I cannot detonate
Without external pressure
I cannot disperse
Without external agency
(*Oily Tears,*11)

The phrases "voices within" and "voices around" convey the same meaning, but the poet has used them in such a repetitive structure to generate some sing-song effects. Again, Ikiriko deploys a set of parallel lines:

And let this houselessnes
This homelessness
This total dispossession

They visited on others
Be their lot

Let it be
The lot of their children
Let it be
The lot of their children's children

(*Oily Tears,*17).

In this dramatic monologue, we could feel the distress and disenchantment of the poet. Through the revolutionary rhythm conveyed by the use of parallelism, the audience is left to experiment with the somberness and distressing feelings of the repressed Niger Delta people as embodied by Ikiriko. By speaking up for the people, Ikiriko bears the hope and assumes a messianic image. Again, Ikiriko expresses the trauma of the people whose sources of fishing occupation have been sullied by the pillaging effects of oil:

You see a pollution-stricken sea-sky
Bereft of the gull's intricate flight-dance,
Parabolic over-head sign of plenty for the fishermen

You see tankers,
Yes, jumbo tankers
Forever pipe-loading
(*Oily Tears,* 22).

In spite of the oil deposit and the phenomenon of spillage and gas flaring that the people are made to face by the oil companies, the profits from the oil business do not manifest in their lives. In Ogbowei's "The Lingo of a Rolling Rabble", we are confronted by the vulnerability of the peasants' condition in the creek who live in delicate structures. The traumatic state of those whose structures are razed by the wind is also unveiled here. Ogbowei expresses amidst laments:

Cruel wind
Lash the lawless lowlands
Wicked winds
Thresh the mindscape
A howling storm

Tears through the ticklish coast
Defenceless defeated
Structures fall
The mind's screens

Are taken down
Blown away
(*Song of a Dying River,* 46)

Through the use of parallelisms, this poem expresses the vulnerable condition of the indigenes of the oil-belt areas of the Niger Delta. The vulnerable atmosphere painted in the poem underscores the negative effect that the turbulent environment has on the people's minds. This implies that the physical and ecological challenges impact the collective trauma narrated by Ogbwei in his poem. The semantic repetition in phrases like "cruel wind," "wicked wind" and

"howling storm," creates a sing-song quality and emphasises the pathetic condition of the people. Parallelism in poetry, as has been demonstrated above, involves the arrangement of coordinate thoughts to the effect that the relationship between them is emphasised and their meaning highlighted. Parallelism is an oral stylistic feature that is utilised to create pleasurable sounds in the poems.

The Nexus between Rhythm and Emotion in the Poems

Rhythm is comparable to beat or pulse. There is rhythm in all human activities because all the actions of humans are exhibitions of different movements. Egudu (1979:34) accentuates this notion when he illustrates: "any action in which motion is involved therefore has some rhythm. For example, the pounding of an engine shows some rhythm. Also, the rise and fall of the water in the ocean is rhythmical". Like the rhythm of life, poetic rhythm implies beat, movement, recurrence, variation or fluctuation. Rhythm in poetry is the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry; meter is the number of feet in a line of poetry; while scansion is the description of the rhythm of poetry by dividing the lines into feet, marking the locations of stressed and counting the syllables. Thus, when we describe the rhythm of a poem, we 'scan' the poem and mark the stresses [′] and absence of stress [˜], and count the number of feet. The following are the major feet in English: iamb [˜ ′], trochee [′ ˜], anapest [˜˜′], dactyl [′ ˜˜], spondee [′′], pyrrhic [˜ ˜].

Iambic and anapestic meters are called rising meters because their movement rises from unstressed to stressed syllable; trochaic and dactylic meters are called falling meters because their movement falls from stressed to unstressed syllable. Spondee and pyrrhic are constant feet, and they are never used as the sole meter of a poem, but they can lead emphasis and variety to a meter when inserted. A frequently heard metrical description is iambic pentameter, a line of five iambs. This is a meter especially familiar because it occurs in all blank verse, such as Shakespeare's plays, heroic couplets and sonnets. The musicality in a poem is greatly influenced by the effects of metrification. The following are lengths of meter: monometer (one foot); pentameter (five feet); dimeter (two feet); hexameter (six feet); trimeter (three feet); heptameter (seven feet); and octameter (eight feet).

The rhythmic flow of poetry is an expression of the emotional beats or pulse. Since rhythm implies movement, it can indicate the kind of feeling or emotion which is the background of that movement. In life, it is common to determine the mood of an individual through their movement. An anguished or numb individual moves wearily and sluggishly. On the contrary,

a happy and relaxed individual moves in a leisurely fashion. Thus, if an individual is moving very fast, we can suspect that he is excited, overjoyed, frantic, or even angry (Egudu, 1979:40). Similarly, the connection between rhythm and mood is common in music. Rhythm in poetry, therefore, serves as the force that propels emotion. Rhythm involves the "natural accompaniment of strong emotion" (Egudu, 1979: 41). This implies that in appreciating the rhythm of poems, the emotions of the poets are highly involved. In Yeibo's "Silent Sorrow," we perceive the anguished tone of the poet, which is conveyed through the mixture of a regular and an irregular rhythm:

> We̓ sle̓epI s̃up̓ine
> Õn b̓edIb̃ugs õf I s̓orr̃ow
> Ãwa̓ke I ãll n̓ight
> To s̓ti̓ngIing̃ so̓ngI õf th̃eI se̓as̃on

The tone in the foregoing lines is that of despondency, which is expressed through a relaxed rhythm. There is a seemingly regular foot in the poem. In some cases, the regular rhythm signifies sorrow and boredom. The regularity of the rhythm prepares the scene for the play of another kind of mood—that of meditation or reflection. The first line is made up of one spondaic foot of two stressed syllables and one iambic foot of one stressed syllable preceded by an unstressed one. But as the poet meditates on his miserable condition, the tempo of the poet's discontentment rises to a crescendo. The irregular rhythmic expression of his trauma is evident in the following lines:

> Da̓wn bri̓stlIẽs wĩthI driz̓zlĩngI de̓ws
> D̃isfi̓Igũriñg I fo̓rẽstI õf f̓un
>
> F̓oiliñgI fo̓ĩlagIẽs õfI f̓anf̃are
> Añd e̓Ivẽn fa̓nIc̃ifũlI f̓lowẽrs
> Õn lo̓amIy so̓il
> Fla̓unt p̓eItals õfI p̓atr̃iImõñy (31)

The rhythm in the poetic lines above relates to the emotions of the poet. Like music, poetry stirs feelings through rhythm. If the subject matter of a poem is emotional, words are used to depict such a situation. This implies that before one determines the rhythmic pattern of a poem,

one must first ascertain the level of emotion being communicated by the poem through the words. Ogbowei's "Our Home's Hurting" expresses a somber rhythm, which reflects the agony of the Niger Delta natives. The idea of loss conveyed in the poem is redolent of the incessant militarization and dehumanization in the Niger Delta region. Ogbowei laments:

Thẹ̀y ˜ve **I** cọ̀me t̃o **I** cõnsọ̀le **I** us̀
Whọ̀ hãve **I** ṅo pẹ̀ace **I** t̃o gi̇ve
Thẹ̀y 'ṽe**I** cọ̀me t̃o **I** cõnsọ̀le **I** us̀
Whọ̀ hãve **I** ṅo jọ̀y **I** t̃o shạ̀re (90)

The deployment of the trochaic meter in the first two feet in the first line of the extract of the poem shows the regularity in the poet's numb mind. The trochaic meter of one stressed syllable followed by a stressed one is succeeded by an iambic foot. However, the last stressed syllable stands on its own. But as the poem progresses, the rhythm becomes irregular. This kind of tone is also evident in Ikiriko's "Baseless Compass", where the rhythm captures emotional fragmentation provoked by the miserable circumstances in which the poet finds himself. He laments this emotional and psychological agony in the following lines:

Wẹ̀ ãre **I** ãdṛ̀ift
Õn˜a sp̀ace**I**sḥip
Wi˜th a˜ll **I** õur ri̇ghts
Ãnd bẹ̀**I**nẽf̃its**I** s̃uspẹ̀nd **I**˜ed
Họ̀pe lẹ̀aks**I** õut
Fr̃om õur **I** ĩn**I**s̀ide
Lẹ̀avĩng**I** ũs ẹ̀mp**I**t̃y
Ãs ã **I** bạ̀sḵet **I** õf wạ̀**I**tẽr
(*Oily Tears, 21*)

The first line of the poem above is made up of one foot each of trochee and iamb. It is wise to dissect the little observance of the regular rhythm of anapest in the second line, where there is a mixture of one foot of two unstressed and one stressed syllable. However, there is a stressed syllable that stands out on its own. However, there is a perceived temporary steadiness in the rhythm in the poems that depict the image of hope. This confident and relaxed rhythm is evident in Yeibo's "Hope". Yeibo opens the poem with the vision of hope. The first line, which is made up of two feet of iamb, is regular; the second line is made up of two regular trochee feet. This regularity is short-lived as the emotion of the poet is further troubled by the thought of anguish that undulates the current of hope. Yeibo croons:

F̃or wh̓en**I** th̃e mȯon
Mȯunts th̃e**I** sk̓y-stãge
…
Stȧrs sȧve**I** th̃eir ȯil
Fõr ãn**I**ȯthẽr**I** d̓ay

Therefore, in the third line, there is a mixture of one foot of spondee and one foot of iamb. In the fourth line, there is a mixture of one foot of trochee and one foot of iamb, while the last stressed syllable stands alone. Though the meter in the poem is varied, the rhythm is generally fast-moving and it signals a joyful feeling. A poem with such a racy rhythm has little time for thought or reflection. The reader is first carried along by the rhythm, which arouses in him the feeling of joy that the poem conveys. Equally, in Ogbowei's "The morgue", we notice a similar tone:

T̃he mȯrg̃ue
İs ã **I**pl̓ace õf**I** pėace
Whėre th̃e**I** t̓igẽr
Ño mȯre**I** st̓alks

(*Song of a Dying River,*106)

The foregoing analysis of rhythm in the poems under investigation justifies the conception that the rhythms of the poems encourage the full emotional impulse of the verse to both the reader and the writer. In that case, the therapeutic tendency of the sonorous flow of the poems, like musical blues, is made possible through the rhythmic variations. While the rhythm describes emotions, it reinforces meaning and generates pleasure. In that case, it unifies and harmonises thoughts and feelings. The remedial effects of poetry is made possible through rhythm.

Conclusion

The analysis in this study shows the interface between trauma and therapy in Niger Delta poetry. The researchers have located trauma and bibliotherapy in three poetry collections from Nigeria's Niger Delta region, which are: Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta,* Yeibo's *The Forbidden Tongue* and Ogbowei's *Song of a Dying River.* Through a sombre and melancholic language, the poets convey the collective trauma of the natives of the oil-belt area of the Delta, whose means of income and existence— lands and water bodies— are despoiled by the oil extractors. Beyond the poetic-narration of the agonies faced by the people, the poets generate

mentally pleasing rhythms, which are made possible by the deployment of sound devices and metrification. The study, therefore, finds that there is a nexus of relationships that manifests through sounds, rhythm and emotions in the poems. Since the poets embody the agony and hope of the masses, the language of their poems shows the impact of trauma and therapy. The tones of the poems read like those of a traditional blues; and since blues has proven to be invigorating to the human psyche, the poems are considered therapeutic. What makes this pleasing rhythm palpable is the deployment of different devices of sounds such as alliterations, consonance, repetitions, refrains and parallelisms. The entangling throb of the poetic lines affects the minds of the writers and the audience. Besides the examination of the poetry of Ikiriko, Yeibo and Ogbowei on the concept of bibliotherapy, the researchers go as far as to establish interview sections with some of these poets, particularly Yeibo and Ogbowei, to assess the healing import of their verses.

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